

**CEMM Graduation
Keynote Address
January 17, 2003**

Good Evening Graduates!

And good evening to everyone else that came to witness this graduation....

Congratulations on your accomplishment – one I can fully appreciate...4 ½ years ago – I sat in your seats – as a very proud graduate of Cohort #1.

First, I want to thank you. I'm honored and humbled by your invitation to be the keynote speaker. While I have received my share of recognition in recent years, none of that means as much as the recognition of one's peers. You have given me a great gift; something I will always cherish. Thank you!

Now: Cohort #13...I would like to ask you to do something for me. Stand up. Please, stand up. Do we have all two dozen graduates standing? Ok... raise your left hand... no, not your right hand.. your left hand! Now, drop your arm down like this...And give yourselves a pat on the back for a job well done!

Now, please turn to face your family, friends and admirers.

Next, all other CEMM graduates -- would you please stand? Since I've got the microphone, I am going to speak for all of the 350 plus graduates of Cohorts 1 - 12 that have taken this path before you.

Cohort 13 ---- We are proud of you! Welcome to our ranks. You are part of an elite, dedicated group of professional public managers; the new leaders of the District Government!

You get to make a positive difference in the quality of service the District provides to those who live, work and visit this great city.

We look forward to working with you.

We look forward to mentoring you when you need help.

We look forward to reaping the rewards of this investment in each of you.

AND we look forward to seeing you in the CEMM "aftercare" alumni program, better known as the DC Society for Certified Public Managers. Nancy Hapeman, our newly elected President is here tonight. Thank you Nancy.

Tonight, we ALL applaud you and your accomplishments.

It's been a long year for you; Are you tired?

How about your friends and loved ones?

Families? Husbands? Wives? Partners? Children? Supervisors and colleagues?

Are you ready to have your CEMM student back as a full-time contributing member of your life, family or organization?

We know you've picked up the slack created by your graduate's commitment to CEMM. Let me thank each one of you for your meaningful contribution to our quest to create the ***best-run city in the world!***

And to our benefactors...you have given us a great gift - a meaningful education - Fannie Mae, the Cafritz Foundation, the World Bank, and of course GW University. You have helped enable and empower over 350 of the District Government's future leaders.

And to Natalie and the CEMM staff...you guys rock!

Graduates, please join me in a round of applause for all the people who help us flourish!!!

In a few minutes, I'm going to tell you a story. Before that, I've got some good news and some bad news for you.

First the bad news: (I always prefer to hear the bad news first!)

When you choose to dedicate yourself to the challenges that the District government faces..... the last 13 months will seem easy. I don't want to scare you, but more productive work and learning is in front of you than behind you.

Now, the good news... You are equipped... fully equipped!

You are prepared and you are ready.

You have everything you need to face your future as a dedicated leader in the District of Columbia's Government. Let me assure you that the REWARDS are also in front of you.

Whatever your job, this wonderful program has equipped you to lead. When each of you get back to your life ... and so-called "regular" jobs we are counting on you to **be leaders. Not next month. Not next year. Now.**

Ready for my story? I want to share some of what I've learned ... and experienced and come to understand since my graduation - 4 ½ years ago.

OK, here we go.

It was July, 1998. There we were at our CEMM graduation in the World Bank Headquarters Atrium. It was a beautiful setting, a beautiful night. Everything was sparkling! We were Cohort #1. My team was BAH RAM U.

We were all so proud. We were excited Pumped up. And jazzed about the possibilities.

Wow!

You know, let me share a secret I'm not even sure how I got to be the grown-up, let alone the Director of DPW!

But, I'll paint you a picture:

CEMM graduation is over and I'm back to my not-so-sparkly office in the SWMA "quanset hut" on South Capital Street. My full time and attention is turned to Solid Waste, where I was the administrator of the largest division in DPW. Until CEMM, I hadn't even had a management class. But, I *was* the administrator. Last woman standing, I guess.

And I had a pipe dream. I wanted to see routine services delivered with a published schedule and delivered on time. Scheduled services and on-time performance... that was my dream!

Could we get there? I wouldn't be here if I didn't think so.

We were an agency of dedicated people Experienced people Well-intentioned people. Yet, we remained ill equipped in sooo many ways to perform our jobs. While we often failed, it wasn't for a lack of trying.

We lacked equipment - We had a sorry fleet of trucks – 50% of the capacity needed to pick up the day's trash. That is, when they were running.

We lacked training. I hadn't had a training course in more years than I care to remember. Neither had anyone else.

We lacked a supportive infrastructure. We had Union agreements that were ancient, and which prohibited operational changes needed to meet our obligations.

We were governed by legislation that was in constant conflict with operational realities.

We were sued repeatedly by environmental groups for not meeting our legislated recycling obligations.

We lacked support from upper management. They always wanted us to “do more with less”...words I have come to despise...but that's another story.

To say the least, we were running on empty... And then, things started to happen. We were the first administration in the DC Government to ‘embrace” Performance measures...and I use the term *embrace* loosely. Performance measure for trash collection? Shoot... The best I can say is, we were glad if we got the trash picked up by midnight on the right day!

With little more than blind faith, we prepared for implementation: Staff training, data gathering and process mapping started one year BC (before CEMM). It was painful and exhausting. In the midst of it all, I joined Cohort #1 and immersed myself in the CEMM experience, hoping against hope for some help. And I got it.

After graduation, I had more courage. I had a support network. I had a language and a framework and a better understanding of the payoff, if, no – excuse me, WHEN we were successful.

When "Management" asked me a question, they got the most objective, straightforward answer that I could give. Like it or not. Good news or bad. They needed to hear the truth. We needed them to understand that it was neither laziness nor incompetence keeping us from succeeding...if we couldn't demonstrate what we knew, we never would have been 'granted' the resources we needed to get this mess straightened out.

Facts are simply facts. And the numbers proved that - they gave our story credibility.

When you act with integrity in your day-to-day work life, it doesn't take so much courage to speak the truth. If we've made a mistake and there are some lumps to take, so be it. We'll take our lumps.

We were painfully clear that we were not perfect.

But they weren't going to 'catch me lookin'. If I was going down, I was going to go speaking a clear truth; as objectively and respectfully as possible. You see, after CEMM, the goal became more important than keeping my job. Performance measures helped us. Good performance measures speak the truth.

**Leaders speak the truth.
Be a leader.**

In February 2000, shortly after my appointment as Deputy Director for strategic planning at DPW, I was selected to attend the JF Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. I went with 4 other graduates from Cohort #1. Again, courtesy of, and my thanks, to the Fannie Mae Foundation. That was another extraordinary experience. Different than CEMM. We didn't get to go home for 21 days.

What did I learn there? How very cold cold can be. If you think this is cold, try being in Boston in February. And it gave me the opportunity to PLAY in the snow again! The first time in 15 years that I didn't have to worry about getting it off the ground. And I learned the value of play in the team process.

More than anything, though, I learned that it takes a Village. I learned tolerance for the perspective of other stakeholders. To be an effective leader, I needed to own that. I needed to value the contribution of politicians, complaining citizens and little old ladies. Now, I know that I can't get a clear picture without that. Tolerance is a valuable commodity. I understand and value the contributions from all of us.

**Leaders embrace and promote tolerance.
Be a leader.**

For my CEMM project, I teamed with Cohort #2 graduate, Hallie Clemm, to build a model for program-based-budgeting. Then we began implementation. I don't like to think about those first 2 years. But once we got it together, DPW was better positioned to compete for the resources we would eventually use to meet our commitments. We demonstrated where our dollars were going, and the outcomes in service delivery those dollars would buy. We demonstrated that fixing problems freed up money to be used toward other improvements. (Keeping people on the clock, picking up trash til midnight, while the trucks were taped together costs a lot of money)

Then it was time for Mayor Williams and Councilmember Schwartz, Chair of DPW's Council Committee to do their part. They funded our equipment replacement program. They funded our Training Academy.

Suddenly, things started to happen. Good things, I mean. That was something we weren't used to. We were finally getting what we needed! Who'd a thunk! Honestly? Sometimes, not even me. But, I kept going anyway. Putting one foot in front of the other. What else was there to do?

Legislative changes have and are still taking place. I have found that our legislative branch of government is eager to help us. Believe me... they are not our adversaries... they REALLY want to help us. It's important for each of you to know that. We all want to same thing. Take all the help you can get. Everywhere we turn, we're getting support.

**Leaders successfully compete for resources.
Be a Leader!**

One of the things that became clear to me over my career was that we, the District Government, would benefit from coordinating the delivery of clean city services across agency lines. At the time, DPW, DOT, DCRA, MPD, DOH, and others, would go into a blighted neighborhood one

agency at a time, blind to the other agencies' programs and activities. It's no wonder that any real impact was negligible!

We needed to better communicate. We needed to work cooperatively if we were ever to achieve sustainable results.

Radical concept? Pipe Dream?

Not any more, my friends. Neighborhood Services is real! And, fellow Cohort #1 graduate and my dear friend, Dr. Patrick Canavan, is its director. That's another thing CEMM gave me, lifelong friends. Most days, Patrick is like the orchestra conductor.

As a government, we ARE doing a better job than we used to do.

Leaders dream.

Be a Leader!

In July of 2000, I was appointed interim director of Public Works. As the interim director, I was faced with enough difficult situations that I wasn't sure I wanted the permanent appointment. One day I almost didn't go back to work.

Some of my bosses were committed to firing one of my subordinates. Really, they were committed to ME firing one of my subordinates. Being an interim, I had no authority to argue effectively. I was frustrated. I cried. I almost resigned.

But I knew that any other Director would be less likely to treat this dedicated, long-term employee with the respect that I would.

When people fail it is important to understand why they've failed, while acknowledging and respecting their commitment and effort. Failures due to institutional and organizational factors are never solved by blaming, and firing, individuals. So I sucked it up and accepted the Director's position.

I committed myself to working with **the people that are the core of DPW**, and became determined to show the world that DPW has the most dedicated and hard working employees in the Government.

No one got hurt. Performance improved. I'm very proud of that fact.

My father put it this way... "It is the responsibility of each of us to respect the rights of all of us. It is the responsibility of all of us to respect the rights of each of us."

A leader ensures that all people are treated with respect.

Be a leader.

Over the past 2 snow seasons, we have built the best team we've ever had in DPW. And DPW has had some great teams! And now we have the equipment to match. The only thing more powerful than an individual 'maniac on a mission,' is a team of 'maniacs' dedicated to the delivery of top-notch service. More than that, this TEAM of people knows that we are in this together. Sink or swim, we do it together. And we are swimming!

Leaders build teams.

Be a Leader!

You've probably heard: the economy is sluggish, and we are facing large budget deficits. Last time this happened, we were 'given' a control board -- further limiting our ability to exercise our basic right to self-govern. This time it's going to be different . . . in large measure, because of US!

The immediate challenge? To guide our government through the current round of economic difficulties. I want each of you to know...to believe... to understand ... that you CAN make a difference. You MUST make a difference. You WILL make a difference.

Leaders are diligent.

Be a Leader!

We – you and I – are going to do our part to keep our government running effectively. I want you to think about how to approach tomorrow. I want you to think about how to approach the people you will meet ... and work with ... or the constituents to whom you will deliver service tomorrow.

Public service. It's more than a phrase... more than a job. It's a commitment. Government work is tough... it's important ... and it's satisfying. Think about it... in the truest sense, government exists to provide the services that the private sector can't or won't deliver.

As CEMM graduates, you have now lost your right to walk over a problem. If you see it, fix it – or bring it to the attention of somebody who can. Do not accept it. Do not accept mediocrity or tolerate the status quo. Do not succumb to “business as usual.”

And do not believe for a moment, that someone else will take care of it. Don't rationalize inaction.

Decide what kind of a leader you want to be. State your intentions – to yourself - in writing – and to other CEMM graduates. Then, work to become that leader.

When you are faced with quandaries...go back to these statements to clarify what a leader of your 'ilk' would do in a situation like that..... Then do it.

Never lose sight of the core mission: serving the District of Columbia's residents, businesses and visitors. We ***are*** the Nation's capitol! Whether you are in a direct service delivery operation or part of a support function like personnel, finance or procurement, the ONLY reason we are here is to provide service. To make our city the BEST in the world; the model for all that is good in government service.

Nurture the best...in yourself... then, in your staff.

Lead and teach by example.

Leaders live intentionally.

Be a Leader!

Thank you very much.